

Around the World

by Elizabeth Reins

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Summary: When Emma leaves for her trip around the world with her family, she doesn't think she can enjoy it-especially since they are staying on a boat. But what Emma discovers while traveling will change her life forever. Is it possible that she and her friends aren't the only mermaids that exist? Are there other moon pools with other powers out there?

1. Chapter 1

Hello, everyone! I love the show H2O, and I was really disappointed when Emma wasn't on season three because I loved her character. So I thought it would be fun to explore what her experiences were when she was away from Cleo and Rikki, and that's when I thought of this idea! Hope you like it!

* * *

><p>There is nothing in the world like this. The sound of the water lapping against the stone, the way the current feels against my tail, the-

What was that?

Suddenly I felt very open and vulnerable stuck in the moon pool all by myself. There was no way I could transform back in time if it was someone I didn't know, and then I would be in BIG trouble.

"Who's there?" I called. "Cleo? Rikki? Is that you?"

Two heads bobbed up in the center of the water.

"Ya, it's us," Cleo said. "We wanted to talk with you one last time before you left, and we figured you would be here."

I sighed. I wasn't looking forward to this one bit.

My family had decided that traveling the world together would provide a good experience for us, and strengthen my college application. I agreed with them, but staying away from Cleo and Rikki was going to be extremely difficult. Especially since this was our last year of school. There was so much we've done together, and so much more that we wanted to do. Now it seemed like that wasn't going to happen.

I really didn't want to cry.

"Oh, Emma," Cleo said, "Don't cry. We'll still be able to keep in touch. We all have cell phones and there's the internet andâ€" "

"But you know that won't be the same," Rikki interrupted. "How can it be if she's all over the world?"

"Rikki!" Cleo shouted. "That's not helping!"

"But it's the truth!"

"It's okay, Cleo," I said. "I already thought about that. It's just a part of this whole trip."

Cleo looked like she wanted to throw one of her waterballs right in Rikki's face. I understood how she felt (like, REALLY understood) but I also knew it wasn't Rikki's fault. She doesn't deal well with change. And after loosing her mother I would imagine loosing anyone else would be hard.

"I'm sorry, Emma." Rikki said. "I'm just going to miss you too, I guess."

I pushed myself off the ledge I was sitting on and drifted to the center of the moon pool and wrapped my arms around both of them. "We're going to make this work, okay?" I said. I stared my two best friends straight in the eye, "We don't have a choice. We need each other."

We all hugged each other tight, but before we could do anything else, the water started to bubble around us.

"What? The full moon isn't until tomorrow night! Rikki you said you had this pegged!" Cleo shouted.

"I'm just going off what Lewis said! He said the full moon was tomorrow night, January tenth!" Rikki retaliated.

"Rikki! That's tonight!" I yelled. "We have to get out of here now! We don't know what this will do to us!"

We all started to swim to the edge, but without even moving a foot we were all yanked under the surface by a current.

I could feel the water going berserk all around me. The bubbles were so intense that I couldn't see anything. Cleo and Rikki could have been yanked out into the ocean for all I knew. I tried to swim up, but the same current just pushed me right back down, so I was lying flat on my back on the ground of the pool. My head hit two hard orbs that I thought were rocks, until I felt hair tickle my face and I realized that we were all stuck here.

Right as I was about to start panicking, the bubbles slowed and I felt the current lift. I swam as fast as I could straight to the surface. I wanted out of here and FAST.

I yanked myself up and over the edge of the pool and flopped onto the sand. The sweet, soft sand.

"Emma? Are you okay?" Rikki asked.

"Ya, I'm fine. Just a little shaken up. What about you and Cleo?"

"We're both alright," Cleo replied. "But, what just happened to us?"

* * *

><p>I know this is a short first chapter, but don't worry because there is definitely more to come! If you have any suggestions or ideas for the story, review and let me know!</p>

2. Miscommunication

I honestly can't believe all the attention this story has received. Thank you to all who have read this and given time to review!

I apologize for the long wait; my family and I were on vacation for a week visiting my grandparents and they don't have internet. DX And because of all you amazing people who decided to spend their time reading my story, I really wanted to make this good. So I did some researching (a LOT of researching) and I somewhat finalized the story arc. I'm just hoping it paid off! Enjoy!

* * *

><p>Almost done packing. Okay, what does my schedule say for today?

I looked at the itenary I had planned for packing. I had everything perfectly set: moving tape and boxes were near my door, along with a handy stash of permanent markers, and my list of things I needed that coordinated with the schedule for our trip. Today I had to pack my wardrobe.

 Closet. I can do that easy. I already have my boxes ready so I'll just pull them out and then I'll be done.

I picked up a box and started to assemble it. Since this was easy work I'd had a lot of time to think.

It had been a few days since the last full moon. Cleo, Rikki and I hadn't discovered anything unusual about us (well, besides what was already unusual) so we didn't really know what to expect. Rikki thinks that nothing will happen, but I'm not so sure. The moon pool has never been that aggressive with us before.

"Emma," my dad called, "can you come downstairs for a family meeting?"

I set down the cardboard box I was constructing and placed it in the center of my bed. "Coming, Dad!" I shouted.

Twenty-two steps later I was in the family room, sitting down next to my mother on our pristine white sofa. Elliot was on the edge of the living chair across from us, setting down a video game.

"Great, we're all here," my father began. He stood in the center of the room, wearing a huge smile on his face. "I have some last minute news. You know how Harrison wanted to turn Mako Island into a resort?"

I gulped.

"Harrison Bennet?" I asked. "He's not trying again, is he?"

Please say no, PLEASE say no._

"Yes, Harrison Bennett," my dad answered, "and no, he's learned his lesson."

Oh thank goodness._

"After that fiasco he's been more careful in researching his potential locations," my father continued, "and that's actually what my news is about: he's asked me to help promote his island retreats all throughout the Pacific!"

"Neil, that sounds terrific!" my mom exclaimed. She stood up and walked over to my father, reaching out to hold his hand.

"I'm helping to scope out all kinds of possibilities," my dad shared, "and we'll be staying right on the coasts of Japan, California, Chile, literally all throughout the Pacific!"

"This will be a perfect addition to our original travel plans!" my mother stated. "And this will be a fantastic opportunity for our kids to become more experienced! Just think of the application essay you could write, Em! Not all final year students get to experience the world this way."

"Do you think we could go boating?" my little brother chimed in. "I can't wait to tell all my friends that I've gone water boarding off Japan!"

My father's smile seemed to get bigger. "Oh, I can insure that we can go boating, Elliot, because we'll be staying on a boat for our whole trip!"

What?_

Elliot jumped off the chair. "Really? That's so cool! What kind of boat is it? Do we each get our own bedroom?"

"Wait, Dad, we're staying on a boat?" I asked. "Is that even practical? The trip will take forever if we're on a boat the whole time!"

My mother seemed to be a little uncomfortable. "Neil, as much as I

love the water, I don't think I'd want to be on the ocean for a year," she said. "Is that even safe? The waters can get extremely dangerous."

My dad chuckled, "You didn't let me finish! Of course it wouldn't be reasonable to travel by boat the whole time," he smiled. "We'll be flying to most of our locations, but instead of staying in a hotel, we'll be on a luxury houseboat! I know we've stayed in hotels before, so I thought it would be a fun idea for the whole family to try something new. Harrison's been generous enough to pay for it."

Elliot grabbed his video game and darted for the stairs. "This is going to be so awesome! I'm going to finish packing!"

My mom smiled, watching him race up the stairs. "Good thinking, Elliot!" she shouted. Then she turned to me. "Emma, have you packed?"

I've got to get out of this somehow. There is no way this will work. It's a really great idea, though; I can see our whole family enjoying it if I wasn't a fish! Maybe if I talk with dad I can convince him to change his mind.

"Emma?" my mother asked. "Did you hear me, dear?"

"Hmm?" I responded. "Oh! Yes, I heard you. Um, I'm not completely finished but I will be soon."

I gave my mother the most convincing smile I could and walked out of the family room toward the staircase. Halfway up the stairs I whipped out my cell phone:

S.O.S. I typed. Meet me at Mako in ten.

Swimming toward Mako Island, I couldn't help but think what I was going to say. So, you know how I am traveling with my family? Well, some last minute changes have occurred and now I'll be within feet of the ocean for almost half of the trip! Do you guys mind if I end up on the American news? I promise they won't find out about you.

How could I do this?

"Emma!"

I whipped my head around. Did I just hear my name? Underwater? I stopped swimming and twisted toward the sound.

It was about 9:00 at night and the water was a dark grey. The only thing keeping it from being black was the light from the almost-full moon overhead. I couldn't see anyone.

Maybe the stress is getting to me. I should just head for Mako.

—

Spinning around for one last check, I swam towards my original course.

"Emma!"

I stopped again. I knew I wasn't imagining things this time. Someone recognized me and was most likely heading towards me.

Who is it?

"Emma? Can you hear me?"

The voice didn't seem like it was coming from any particular direction, but it sounded familiar. I turned toward the coral reef. Someone must be hiding there.

Just stay calm. Make yourself look intimidating. If you pretend like you're talking to them, maybe you'll feel better about yourself. Hey, you! Whoever you are! If you think you're so hilarious why don't you come out and talk to me face to face?

A brunette head of hair popped up right in front of me.

Bubbles poured out of my mouth as I screamed and swung my tail out at it. It didn't matter who saw me-after I hit them they wouldn't remember any of it. If this tail could break down a metal door it could certainly knock someone out, right?

I grabbed the person by her shoulders and hauled her up to the surface. Whoever it was, she was ridiculously heavy. Were all humans this heavy when they were wet?

Once I got a breath of fresh air, I looked to see who this mystery prankster was.

I got a menacing and bewildered look from Cleo.

"What was that for?" she shouted.

"I thought you were a creeper!" I yelled back, quickly letting her go. "I heard someone shouting my name and I panicked! How often can you understand what someone is saying underwater?"

"So you did hear me?" Cleo asked.

"Heard YOU? You were the one calling my name?" I replied.

"I never called you," Cleo said. "But once I saw you I called out to you in my mind."

Her mind?

"It's a reflex, I guess," she continued. "If I had seen you on land I would have called out to you. I tried to calm you down because I heard you ask who it was, and then I freaked out because I didn't call your name."

"You heard ME?" I asked. "I didn't talk."

"But it sounded like you," Cleo reasoned. "Who else would it have been?"

There is no way.

"Cleo," I thought. "Cleo, can you hear me?"

I saw Cleo's whole face pale, which I didn't think was possible in this light.

"_Emma_," I heard, "_can you hear _me_?_"

I nodded. Cleo and I just stared at each other.

We could hear what the other person said to us through their mind.

"LEWIS!" we both shouted, and raced to Mako Island.

* * *

><p>Thank you to RadicalT0aster, nina19123, H20fan87, RECH2O, kacheekyblu2, KitKatAttack, H20Girl101, Have Socks. Will Travel., and Megansbunch for reviewing my story! All of your comments really helped my confidence in sharing it and hopefully you liked it!<p>

And, as I'm sure many of you have been hearing this lately, I will be moving in to my college dorm this weekend, with school starting the following week! Unfortunately this means I won't have as much time to work on this story, but don't worry because I think about it all the time. Look for an update every one to two weeks. =)

3. Solutions

Hey, everybody! I hate to be one of those people that apologize for taking so long to update their story, but here's what's happened to me since the last time I wrote:

I moved in to college (whoaaaa); suddenly had an influx of homework (mehhh); experienced an earthquake, a hurricane, two tornadoes, and a smoke-triggered fire alarm (any other natural incidents I didn't experience?); and I made the rowing team for my school (HA-BAM!)!

So, I don't know about you, but those all seem like pretty good reasons to be busy. =) Anyways, enjoy the next chapter!

* * *

><p>"Is this something that all three of you can do?" Lewis asked. He was sitting cross-legged on the stones of the moon pool; Cleo, Rikki and I were floating in the water.<p>

"Yes, it is," I replied. "Cleo and I just discovered it on our way here."

"And, as usual, I was the last to find out," Rikki added.

"Well, it was a lot scarier figuring it out by ourselves," Cleo said. "I would have much rather found out about it from you guys than get dragged against my will by a freaked-out Emma. I swear, I'm going to have bruises."

"Oh, I didn't grab you that hardâ€|did I?" I asked.

"Anyways," Lewis interrupted. "I really want to run some tests. And it just so happens that I have my equipment with me in my backpackâ€" "

"Nerd," Rikki coughed.

Lewis continued, "â€"because I have a theory. It mainly has to deal with mammal communication under water. I don't think your ability to speak to each other is actually mind reading, but I'll have to double check and see, soâ€!" Lewis unzipped his pack and pulled out a Petri dish along with some different colored q-tips.

"Oh I don't like this," Cleo mumbled. "This is probably going to get gross."

"I agree," Rikki whispered. "I thought we were done with tests."

Lewis arranged three different colored q-tips in his hand and held them out to us over the water, "Cleo, the purple one is for you; Emma, yours is the blue one; and the red one is Rikki's."

We each took our q-tips and looked at each other wearily.

"Each of you needs to give me a sample of your earwaxâ€" "

"Yuck!" Rikki shouted.

"Be mature about this, Rikki, please," Lewis asked. "It's all for science."

I looked towards a corner of the moon pool and quickly got the job done. It was disgusting to me, but apparently it didn't bother Lewis.

"Can't we just give you a hair or something?" Cleo asked. She was still staring at the cotton swab in her hand. "That's not nearly as disgusting."

"My theory revolves around your sense of hearing, so the closer I can get to your ear the better," Lewis said. He was busy cutting wax paper to fit the bottom of the Petri dish.

"Uh, what do you want with this, then?" Rikki asked. She held the used q-tip slightly away from her, wanting to be rid of it as soon as possible.

"Place it right here," Lewis said. He placed the paper at the bottom of the dish and then held it out to Rikki, who quickly dropped her q-tip in and swam back a foot or two. Cleo and I did the same, after which Lewis placed the lid on top, sealed it with tape, laid it in a plastic bag, and finally set it in his backpack.

"I should be able to see what's causing this ability within the next couple days," Lewis said. "Was there anything different about the Moon Pool the last time?"

"It was pretty aggressive," I said. "It dragged us down under the waterâ€"the current was so strong we couldn't swim against it."

"Why were you even here on a full moon anyway?" Lewis asked. "Haven't we been trying to avoid those?"

Cleo and I turned toward Rikki. "So, I got the dates mixed up!" Rikki stated. "Big deal! I can make mistakes, can't I?"

"These kinds of mistakes are a little more dangerous," Cleo said. "We're lucky nothing bad happened to us."

"Ya, ya, I know that," Rikki said. "Why are we here again? Emma, did you want to talk to us about something?"

I had almost forgotten why I asked everyone to come here.

"Oh, right," I said. "So, I learned something new today and I thought you all should know."

I could feel my confidence sagging. This wasn't going to be received well.

"My dad made some changes to the travel plans, some of them involving a boat," I said. "Instead of staying in hotels like I thought we were, my whole family will be staying on a house boat and a chunk of our trip will be on the coasts of countries along the Pacific Ocean."

Cleo looked numb, Rikki's hair started to spark (I swear) and Lewis was pinching the bridge of his nose.

"But it will all be fine!" I rushed. "I already have a plan, and I think it might possibly work maybe."

"Did you even try to convince your family to change their minds?" Rikki asked. "Do you even care about us anymore?"

"How can you say that, Rikki?" I asked. "Of course I tried to change the plans! But it wasn't just my father's idea"Mr. Bennett asked my father to do him a business favor and he's paid for our stay on the boat. I can't reject a gift like that!"

"Why not?" Rikki continued. "Have you forgotten what that man has done to us? Would you rather the whole world find out we're mermaids? Stay locked up in a big tank forever?"

"I told you, I thought of a plan." I said. "Don't forget that I'm freaking out about this, too. It is going to be me on that boat after all."

"What's your plan?" Lewis asked.

"Do you still have that water repelling spray you made a few months ago?" I asked.

Lewis looked surprised. "I thought you hated that stuff. You all practically became tomatoes."

"But do you have any?" I asked again.

"I mean, ya, I sort of do," Lewis said. "I saved a small sample as a

foundation for future researchâ€"just in case it came up again. But I haven't touched it since."

"I was wondering if you could make some more of that spray for me," I said. "And maybe improve it a tad?"

"And you're fine with looking like a lobster until I do?" Lewis asked.

I was starting to get a little irritated. Did he want me to figure this out or not?

"Look, I don't care, Lewis," I said. "I'd much rather look sunburned than look like a fish. I'm traveling the Pacific and staying on a boat; so help me I'm going to be prepared."

"Alright, then," Lewis rubbed his hands together. "Consider the tests to be back on!"

"Okay, that solves the water," Cleo chimed in. "But what are you going to do about the full moon? If you're already going to be near the ocean, how are you going to avoid it?"

"I'll just do the same thing we've been doing for years," I said. "It's worked so farâ€!"

I saw three disbelieving faces stare at me.

"Right, because what we've done has worked every time," Rikki commented.

Alright, I knew that point was a weak one.

"That's the best I have," I said. "Besides sealing up windows and staying inside, I really don't know what else I can do. I just have to hope it will work."

* * *

><p>I only have a week before I leave. Then I won't see my friends or my home for an entire year.

I sat on the edge of my bed, the proximity of the trip finally hitting me.

I was about to see the world. An ambition that so many people hope for, but I couldn't stop thinking about all the events I would miss. My graduation, for example.

But you'll for sure get into university with this experience. And that's all that matters. Who needs-

Bzzz bzzz.

I felt the comforter of my bed vibrate and glanced down at my phone. It was a text message from Ash.

I feel like I haven't seen him in forever.

I picked up my phone and flipped it open: "Hey, Emma. I wanted to see

you, are you busy?"

I looked around at my practically bare room.

Nope, definitely not busy.

"I want to see you, too," I typed. "Where do you want to meet?"

I twirled the locket around my neck while I waited for him to reply. I opened it and stared at the image inside. I had replaced the photo with a picture of Rikki, Cleo and I (Mrs. Chatham has the original picture, where it belongs), at Mako Island in the Moon Pool. I closed it shut once I felt my phone vibrate again.

"How about the beach?" Ash typed. "Meet me at our usual spot."

I smiled. Of course we would meet at the beach.

"=)," I typed. "See you soon."

I grabbed my bag and walked out of my room, noticing how empty the house was starting to feel. A lot of preparations had to happen so the house would run properly when we returned, and part of that involved taking down pictures and decorations. The walls were completely bare.

Maybe it is a good thing for me to get away from this for a while.

I walked out the front door and grabbed my bike from the side yard, beginning to pedal to the beach.

I'm definitely going to miss this place. The palm trees, the way the wind feels. All of it. Especially Ash.

I couldn't let myself get emotional over this. I was meeting Ash for a date and that was all. Nothing was different. Yet.

Ten minutes later I locked my bike at the boardwalk and walked toward the waves.

"Hey, Emma!"

I turned around to my right and saw Ash sitting on the dunes.

Oh my gosh. _

He had done a typical picnic on the beach—"basket, blanket and all. I didn't think boyfriends actually did this kind of thing. I smiled and walked over to him, kissing him on the cheek when he held my hand.

"Did you really do all of this?" I asked.

"Of course," Ash said. "I only have another week with you until you're gone. But," he pulled me down so we were sitting across from each other on the blanket, "that doesn't mean we won't still see each other."

"Definitely," I said. "Are we still having dinner every Friday

night?"

"Every week, 8:00," Ash agreed. He looked so calm; I didn't know how he did it.

I could feel my eyes starting to water. I didn't know how much longer I was going to last without crying.

"Well, let's see how your cooking is," I grinned. "What do you have for us tonight?"

"Only the best," Ash said. He opened the picnic basket and pulled out two sandwiches and juice boxes. "Peanut butter and banana served with the finest apple juice available."

"I don't think I'm worthy of such a divine meal," I joked.

Ash smiled and tossed me my sandwich. "So," he started, "tell me again where you're going?"

Oh, he doesn't know about the boat, yet...

"Actually, I'm glad you brought that up," I said. "Mr. Bennett has asked my father to do a business favor for him—part of our trip will be spent visiting countries along the Pacific."

"Cool," Ash said. "But you don't seem too excited about it."

"And I have a good reason, too," I replied. Ash's face fell a little.

"Is everything okay?" he asked.

"Uhm," I swallowed my bite of banana sandwich (which was actually pretty good). "Kinda of." My hand started shaking when I reached to pick up my juice.

"Emma, you're starting to scare me," Ash said.

"It's just that—my whole family will be staying on a boat," I said. I set down my partially eaten sandwich. "I found out about this yesterday, and it's really been stressing me out. I tried talking with Cleo and Rikki and Lewis about it, and it kind of helped, but we weren't able to solve everything and I'm going to have to figure out a brilliant solution if I want to make this whole family-bonding-while-we-travel-the-world-together trip work out and at the same time keep myself away from all water while I stay on a BOAT." I placed my shaking hand up to my eyes, resting my head on my knee. "I just don't know what to do."

I think I might have scared Ash a bit. It was quiet while he tried to process my hyperventilated words.

"I'm sorry for that," I breathed. I sat myself up and took a deep breath, looking towards Ash. He scooted over next to me, sitting down and wrapping me in a side-hug.

"You can do this, Emma," Ash said. "Think about how long you kept it secret from me. I had no clue; I mean, I knew something was up, but I'm sure you could pass it off as being seasick or

something."

Seasick. That's not a bad thought.

"I might have to use that," I said. My voice was still shaky, but I was starting to think of some plans. "And we won't be on the boat the entire time, either."

"If you want, we can brainstorm the next big plan during dinner every week," Ash said. "I wouldn't mind."

"Hopefully I won't have to interrupt our dates with my problems," I smiled. "But, thank youâ€|so much."

Ash smiled back. "Like I said, I don't mind at all. I love helping you."

"I'm really going to miss you, Ash," I said. I wrapped both of my arms around him. "I know this is going to be hard, but please don't let me down."

"Emma, I wouldn't even think of doing that," he said. "I mean, a year is a long time, but it's not forever. Besides, I don't think Rikki would let me go alive if I did."

I laughed, "You're right. She has been wanting to have an excuse for lightning practice."

We sat there for a while, finishing dinner and talking about where I'll be going. Ash brought up his riding lessons and how his goal of opening a riding school was starting to happen.

Right when the sun was about to start setting, Ash's watch beeped.

"Oh, we better get going," he said. He started to pack up the basket.

"What are we doing?" I asked. There couldn't be more that he had done. This was too much already.

"It's a surprise," Ash said. "But I think you'll like it."

* * *

><p>Awesome news everyone: I have a twitter account! It's ElizabethReins and you can follow me to receive updates and whatnot about when I'm writing or thinking of ideas or actually posting a new chapter! I would love for you guys to tweet me, but please remember that reviews help the story get noticed, if you know what I'm saying. ;)<p>

4. Surprise!

I'm back, everyone! I am so super extremely ridiculously sorry that I was a horrible person and didn't update this story for months on end. But, to make it up to you, I tried to make it awesome! There's a little Emma/Ash for those of you who are fans of that and a few key developments to keep your minds turning. Stick with me, guys, I

promise it will be worth it! Enjoy!

* * *

><p>"Ha!" I covered my smiling mouth with my hand in surprise.</p>

There were two horses waiting near the pier, saddled and everything.

"I'm sure you remember Rebel," Ash joked, gesturing to the horse on the right.

I felt a twinge of guilt in my stomach. "Ya, how could I forget," I mumbled.

"It's okay, I think he likes you after you took care of him," Ash said.

"You think?" I asked. I wasn't really up for telling anyone, but I was still awkward around horses.

"Oh, don't worry about it, Em," Ash said, "I was only joking. Do you need a lift up?"

I stared at the horse whose head was a good foot taller than mine. "Nope. Should be fine," I replied.

This shouldn't be too hard. I've gotten better since the first time I tried to get on Rebel.

I walked over to Rebel, staring at the stirrup that was at the level of my chest. I could hear Ash checking his saddle and getting on his horse. Working fast, I brought my left foot up as high as I could and barely managed to get it in the stirrup. I bounced a couple times on my right foot and hoisted myself up, almost missing the handle on the saddle.

Panting, I lowered my stomach and swung my right foot over the top of Rebel and stuck it into the stirrup on my right.

"Ha!" I shouted. I turned and looked at Ash who was trying to hold back a laugh.

"What?" I asked. "Who cares how I got up here. Where are we going?"

"As cheesy as it sounds," Ash said, "I thought we could ride along the beach. Are you okay with that?"

Awww. That's so cute.

"Ya, it will be fun," I said. "You go first, though. As much as I know my skills of getting on a horse have improved, I don't think I've made it to the moving part, yet."

Ash laughed, and got his horse to go at a slow walk. Rebel, out of habit, followed at his side.

It really was beautiful. Ash had timed the horse ride perfectly with

the sunset, so the orange and gold and pink colors were reflecting off the waves. There was a cool breeze whistling in with the water and the sand was sparkling in the sun.

We rode down the length of the beach until we arrived at the picnic benches and fire pits. And what I saw surprised me.

Cleo, Rikki, Lewis and Zane were all there, waving at us.

"Ash, do you know what this is?" I asked.

"We all wanted to say goodbye to you, Emma," Ash said. "We wanted to have one last chance where we could all be together and just have a good time."

I was going to start crying again.

"A year isn't all that long," I said. "It's not like I won't see any of you again."

"Yes, but we can still have fun, can't we?" Ash replied.

"Emma!" Cleo shouted. "Have fun on your date?"

"Ya, did you guys do any kissing?" Rikki yelled. Then she made kissing noises loud enough for anyone around us to hear.

"Rikki!" I grumbled. I could tell my face was pink. I wasn't much of a romantic person in front of my friends.

Ash didn't seem to mind, though. He was laughing pretty hard on his horse, actually. I glared at him. Traitor.

As the horses moved closer to the picnic area, I could see there were bags of marshmallows, chocolate and graham crackers covering the table. Drinks from the JuiceNet CafÃ© were in to-go cups and there was even some snorkeling gear.

"Are we going swimming?" I asked Ash.

"We thought it could be fun," he replied. "We picked a spot on the beach that was the most secluded, and Zane offered to rent out the entire place just for us."

"Wow."

"I know, I was surprised, too."

"What?" Zane said. "I can't do something nice for my friends?"

"Oh, come off it, Zane," Rikki teased. "They're only joking."

"Anyway," Cleo said. "We all had dinner already so we brought stuff to make s'mores! But while we still have the lightâ€|"

Cleo got a sneaky look in her eye and ran towards the waves, diving straight into the water.

Lewis wasn't far behind her, grabbing his gear and running towards

the ocean, looking ridiculous waddling through the sand in his flippers.

I laughed so hard I almost fell off of Rebel. Which made Ash laugh even harder.

"Are you sure you don't need help getting off?" he asked.

"Yes, I am sure," I said smiling. "But, um, if I look like I might fall, feel free to intervene."

Ash smiled and quickly dismounted his horse, walking over to Rebel's left side.

>"Whenever you're ready, then."<p>

I took a breath, then slowly took my right foot out of the stirrup, bringing it over Rebel's back and behind my left foot. I clutched the saddle's handle, leaning on Rebel's side. I looked behind me, and slowly started to let myself down to the ground. I felt my foot touch the sand and said, "HA!"

That must have startled Rebel, though, because he lurched forward with my other foot still in the stirrup. Ash ran over to his face and calmed him down, while I frantically untangled myself. I plopped down in the sand and crawled backwards until I was clear of his hooves.

"Ya, you're getting loads better, Em," Rikki smirked. "Any other tricks you want to show us?"

"How about me beating you in a race to the reef?" I challenged.

"All right then," Rikki grinned. "Meet you in the water."

She grabbed Zane's hand and walked toward the ocean, looking back with a kissy face towards me. I rolled my eyes and stuck my tongue out at her.

"For what it's worth, Emma," I heard Ash say. "You are improvingâ€|a little." He smiled at me.

"It's alright, Ash," I said. "I'll get better eventually."

"Let's hope so," he joked. "I don't know how much more Rebel can handle."

"Whatever," I grinned.

We walked the horses over to a patch of dune grass and tied them to a nearby picnic table.

"Can we just leave them here?" I asked.

"Ya, some of the stable hands are coming to pick them up," Ash said. "They'll be here soon."

I realized that we were alone again. Sure, my friends were close by, but they were busy playing in the ocean. Although I'm sure Rikki was watching just so she could tease me about kissing Ash later.

"Hey, Emma," Ash began. "I know that a trip around the world is something to really look forward to. I mean, I hardly ever leave town. But just know, that I really am going to miss you."

I could feel my eyes starting to water again. If I had known I was going to be close to crying this much I wouldn't have worn mascara. And as many times as I had stopped myself from crying today, this time I finally let it go. I felt the first silent tear come down, and the rest followed soon afterward.

Ash pulled me into a hug, and we just stayed there for a while. Luckily my tears weren't chest-shuddering sobs accompanied by a runny nose; they were just silent, and I let them come. I had spent so much time trying not to think about how much I was going to miss my friends and Ash, that all of my emotions seemed to be surfacing at once.

Ash was a good sport while I was going through my breakdown. He stood there, rubbing my back and occasionally pressing his lips to my hair. I was so lucky to have him, and he shouldn't have to see me crying on our last actual date. I let the last few tears drop, and pulled back. I wiped one side of my face with my hand, but before I could clean up the other side, Ash had already moved his thumb across my cheek. I looked up at him and gave him a soft smile.

He looked worried, but I think seeing me smile lightened him up a bit. And because I didn't want this date to be remembered as a sad one, I reached up and kissed him.

"Finally!" Rikki shouted.

Still kissing Ash, I smiled a little bit and pictured the water around Rikki's tail freezing solid.

"Hey!" she yelled. I heard her start to threaten me, but then Cleo reminded her that she could simply melt the ice around her fin.

By that time, Ash and I were already laughing, holding hands walking towards the water.

"Still up for that race?" I asked Rikki.

"Oh, we'll see if you're still so confident after I beat you," Rikki retorted. "Let's go."

For the record, it was a tie. Rikki tried to convince everyone there that she was the one who reached the reef first, but I have Cleo as a witness.

"I don't care what Cleo says," Rikki continued. "It was obvious who won the race."

Rikki was sitting next to Zane around the fire pit, roasting her marshmallow over the fire she had started.

Cleo and I looked at each other and we both just rolled our eyes. Cleo was sitting next to Lewis, who was eating a s'more he had just made, and he was having some trouble with the marshmallow and chocolate spilling out the back. Cleo watched him, giggling the whole time.

I laughed a little bit myself; Lewis trying to eat from both sides of an oozing s'more was pretty funny. I leaned back a little bit, resting against Ash. We were both just sitting there, watching the fire. I was focusing on some of the rising embers, trying to form ice crystals from the moisture in the thin air around the red specks before they disappeared.

"So I have the results of the tests," Lewis announced.

Everyone looked immediately up at Lewis, and then burst into laughter. He had melted chocolate and blobs of marshmallow all around his mouth. He looked confused for a minute, and then realized what he must have looked like.

"Is it really that bad?" he asked Cleo.

"Uhmâ€œ!" Cleo giggled. "Here, let me help." She focused on the water from her cup and controlled a small sphere up near Lewis's face, cleaning up all the signs of the s'mores he had eaten.

"Thanks," he said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. "Anyways: yes, I have the results of the test I just performed and it was similar to what I had originally expected."

"Well," Rikki interrupted, "can we read minds or not?"

"Not exactly," Lewis replied. "If you could actually read minds, you would be able to read each other's minds right now, but that obviously is not the case. No, what you're able to do is based on how sound travels through water.

"It's similar to the way that dolphins communicate: they emit a sequence of low frequency sounds that travel through the water. The sounds that you are emitting are at a much lower frequency than dolphins', though. So much lower, in fact, that they are only audible to, as far as I could find, mermaids. For you three, the sound is so low that you mentally recognize it within your mind and are yet still able to determine direction. All in all, it's an extremely impressive form of communication."

"I have a question," Cleo said. "If you said that we use the low frequency sound for communication, then why do I hear dolphins speaking at high frequencies?"

"Well, the two have different uses," Lewis answered. "The high frequency sounds are actually what dolphins use for their echolocation. The low frequency sounds are specifically used for communication, since they can travel long distances through water."

"How far do you think we can hear each other?" Rikki asked.

"I don't have a specific distance," Lewis answered, "but I bet you could hear each other for miles, easy."

"I wonder if that means we would be able to talk to you, Emma!" Cleo said. "That would be amazing!"

"That would be pretty incredible," I said. "But I don't think it

could reach me in all of the places that I will be going to."

"Who cares?" Rikki asked. "I say we give it a shot!"

I had to smile at their enthusiasm. Who knows, maybe it would work.

My smile turned into a yawn, and I suddenly wondered what time it was. It felt like we hadn't been out here long, but then again I hadn't been paying much attention to the time. Lewis answered my question for me.

"Well, I should probably be getting you back home, Cleo," Lewis said. "I don't want to get on your father's bad side."

Cleo sighed. "Alright."

"Ya, I should probably take you home, too," Zane said to Rikki. "I know that misunderstanding between your father and me was cleared up, but I still think he wouldn't mind chewing me out for doing something wrong."

We all started to move around and clean things up. Cleo put out the fire while everyone else grabbed the trash and threw it in a nearby waste bin.

"Thank you for doing all of this, you guys," I said to everyone. "It really meant a lot, and it was so much fun."

"We're glad you liked it," Cleo smiled. "And who knows? You still have a week before you leave with your family, so we could definitely do all of this again."

"I'd like that," I replied. "And we should all meet at Mako one time. It's weird to think that I won't be seeing that island for an entire year."

I gave Cleo and Rikki a hug goodbye, waved to Lewis and Zane, and walked towards my bike with Ash.

"I almost forgot I rode my bike to the beach," I joked. "It seems like such a long time ago."

"Well don't think I'm going to let you ride back home all by yourself," Ash said. "We'll put it in my car."

"Thank you," I said. "But just to let you know, there isn't too much to worry about. Built-in freeze ray, remember?"

Ash smiled at that. "Still, I want to make sure you make it home safely."

I realized we had a little bit of a walk to go; we rode those horses down the beach much farther than I had originally thought.

"This really was fantastic," I said. "Before you texted me, I was just sitting in my room thinking about all of the things I was going to miss. Today really picked me up. I realized that even though I'll be missing out on a great year with my friends, I'm going to have a great year, myself."

"I'm glad," Ash said. "You should be focusing on how much fun you're going to have. Just don't have too much fun and end up realizing that there are other guys out there who are probably much more exciting than me."

"Oh please," I rolled my eyes. "It's not every day that I find someone I can trust. Don't count yourself out like that."

We kept on talking during our walk back. I told him how I was excited to go to Fiji and Hawaii, and France, too. I already had itineraries planned for the stops on our trip. Ash said he wanted a postcard from each place I went to, especially Yellowstone Park in America ("the wildlife there is going to be incredible") and Germany ("there are great cars in Germany").

Before I knew it, the walk to my bike was over. I unlocked it, and brought it over to Ash's truck in the nearby parking lot. He lifted it into the back, and then opened the door for me on the passenger side.

I twirled the locket around my neck while I waited for Ash to sit on the driver's side. While I did that, I felt my thumb catch on something on the backside. Confused, I flipped the necklace around, but it was too close to my face for me to see anything. I reached up behind my neck to unclasp itâ€"

"Ready to go?" Ash asked.

I quickly rearranged my hands, making it look like I was simply fixing my hair and gave a quick nod.

I didn't live too far from the beach, so we were there much sooner than I would have liked. Ash helped me get the bike out of the back and I walked it over to the side of my house. When I came back around, we both walked up to my front door.

"Thank you again, Ash," I said. "I didn't realize how much I needed this."

"Anytime, Emma," Ash replied. He smiled, then bent down and kissed me.

* * *

><p>Aww, how sweet. If someone did all of that for me, I know I would surely appreciate it. I wonder if Ash has ever used his horses to win girls overâ€¦haha. =)<p>

Thank you guys for sticking with me so far! Every time I get a review my day gets that much better. Hopefully this made up for the long wait!

5. One Last Trip

Hello, everyone! I FINALLY have the next update for this story. I had this master plan of where Emma and her family were going to go, and each stop was coordinated with an episode from season 3. I had it printed out on a map, and then guess what? I couldn't find the map! I

looked everywhere for it and finally had to accept that someone had thrown it away. It was so annoying, and it put me off for a few months because I spent so much time planning this story and I would have to do it all over again.

But never fear! I have vowed to never leave a story unfinished because I hate when that happens on fanfiction, so even though it may be a while before this story is updated (though I am sincerely trying to be better with updating) just know that I am always thinking about the next chapter in this story.

Happy holidays and enjoy the new chapter!

* * *

><p>The last few days before my family trip started went by faster than I could believe. I saw all of my friends whenever I could, and Ash and I crammed more dates in days than I thought possible. Before I knew it, it was my last day at home. Our flight left at 9:00 a.m. for our first destinationâ€"New Zealand. This was more of a business trip than anything else, though. Because Mr. Bennett asked us to help promote his business, a few other trips had to be added in.</p>

We had been to New Zealand a handful of times. It was close enough that traveling wasn't a problem. But this would be the first time since I had become a mermaid. That seemed to make this trip into a completely new experience.

I kept thinking about what Lewis had discovered. How Cleo, Rikki, and I could now communicate across insanely huge distances. New Zealand wasn't too far awayâ€|I wondered if I would be able to talk to them. I would honestly be able to swim the distance, if anything.

I sighed. This last day at home felt strange. I felt like I was finally able to look forward to this trip and now I had to wait another day before it started. I felt bad to want to leave, but I could honestly now say I was excited. I would be able to see so many amazing things, and when I came back I would have so many stories to tell.

Or at least I hoped. My one fear was that something extremely bad was going to happen to me while traveling abroad. Someone spilling a drink on me on an airplane, accidentally getting sprayed with water while on the houseboat, a sudden rainstorm forcing me to run into a stranger's houseâ€|all of these weren't really too improbable, and that made me extremely nervous.

Lewis had been able to give me a handful of bottles that contained the waterproof spray we had tried a year ago. He said he tried to make it so it wouldn't turn me completely red, but he couldn't promise anything. I told him I would just tell people I had a bad sunburn.

I lounged on the couch in our family room, trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my day. I was lying down so my entire body took up the length of the sofa, my feet dangling off the edge of the armrest. I kicked them back and forth, back and forth, failing at coming up with something that would be a perfect way to spend my last day at home.

I sat up the second I thought of it. It was so obvious, why didn't I think of it before? I texted everyone in my mermaid circle of friendsâ€"we were going to Mako.

I smiled as I felt the water rushing past me as I swam to my favorite island. I needed closure, and this was the perfect place to get it. I slowed down to an easy pace as I neared the reef, taking cautious strokes as I passed a group of sharks. No matter how many times I saw them, sharks still freaked me out.

I popped my head above the water and looked around. I was the first one there, so I swam to the giant step in the pool and laid my head back in the sand. I reached up to my neck for my locket and remembered that it never appeared in my mermaid form.

I had checked that locket every day since I felt my thumb catch on the smooth silver backside, but no matter when I looked, nothing was wrong with it. It was completely bewildering. I know I wasn't making things up when I felt that latch, so where did it go?

I pulled myself up out of the water and waited to dry off. This was one of the many times when I wish my power could speed up my transition. Rikki could steam dry herself, and Cleo could just wipe all the water off. But freezing my tail solid wasn't going to make me any drier. I just had to rely on my patience.

I was almost dry when I heard Cleo shout my name. She and Rikki popped their heads out of the water and smiled at me. I was almost dry, so the most I could do was sit up and wave.

"Need some help?" Rikki asked. Without an answer she raised her fist and evaporated the remaining water off of my tail. In a matter of seconds I was back to my human form.

"You guys have it so nice," I said. "If I go swimming without a towel I'm doomed to lay on the sand for at least ten minutes."

"Well it's a good thing you usually go swimming with us!" Cleo said. I smiled, then felt my mouth form a line when I remembered I would be swimming without Cleo and Rikki for a while. Cleo seemed to realize this as well, and hastily changed the subject.

"The boys should be here in a few minutes," she said. "They're bringing some food and music with them. We should have a great party by the time they get here!"

"Great!" I said. "This is exactly how I wanted to spend my last day before setting off."

"You're not still sad are you, Emma?" Rikki asked. She and Cleo had swum over to the large step in the pool. I was sitting cross-legged on the sand near the edge. "You're going to have a great time traveling."

"I know I am," I said. "And I can honestly say that I am excited to go on this trip now. Lewis was able to run some of the water repellent over to me earlier this week, and that made me feel much better."

"Good," Cleo said. "He was working really hard to get that over to

you before you had to leave, Emma. He wanted to make sure it would all work correctly. Of course, I had to become Lewis's test subject again. I hope you know how much I do for you as a friend!"

I laughed at the thought of poor Cleo, wanting to be a good friend to me and a supportive girlfriend to Lewis, subjecting herself to Lewis's constant questions and annoying random splashes of water repellent and water itself. No doubt she had a few more bruises from falling down without warning.

"Of course, it would have been easier if Rikki had volunteered to help out," Cleo said, glaring at Rikki.

Rikki just lounged on the rock, not looking bothered at all. "Emma knows I'm a good friend. I don't have to put myself through torture if I don't want to. I'm not the one who's dating the science geek of the group."

Cleo looked like she was about to respond, but then shrugged her shoulders and nodded with a smile on her face. We all laughed at that.

Rikki and Cleo pulled themselves out of the water and started to dry off. I hung back against the rock wall and reached up for my locket. I ran my thumb against the back of the necklace, hoping that the latch would appear again.

"Have you guys noticed anything weird about our lockets lately?" I asked Rikki and Cleo.

Rikki gave me a weird look. "What do you mean, Emma?"

I felt stupid bringing this up, especially with Rikki looking at me like I was losing my mind, but I had to know if I was the only one or not.

"The other night, after we were at the beach, I was moving my locket on the chain and I felt my thumb catch on something. It startled me because I knew nothing like that was ever on the back, but I didn't get the chance to get a closer look at it. I haven't been able to feel a latch again."

"Maybe it was just some sand on the back," Cleo suggested. "After I go to the beach I find sand everywhere."

"But this didn't feel like sand, Cleo," I said. "It felt like there was a slit in the back and if I pulled at it, the back would come off. I've tried to see if the locket can come apart but there is no way anything could fit in there."

"I think you are making a big deal about this, Emma," Rikki said. "We've had these necklaces for years and if there was anything in them, Ms. Chatham would have told us, don't you think?"

"Yes, I suppose you're right," I said. "But I still think it's strange."

"Who's ready for a party?" I heard Lewis's voice echo from the passage down the steps and he soon appeared holding a stereo and some CDs.

"I am always up for a party!" Rikki exclaimed.

Zane and Ash followed Lewis holding food, strings of lights, beanbag chairs, and a projector.

"Zane was able to grab an old projector from his dad's office," Ash said. "I brought a movie and Lewis had a power generator. We thought it would be fun to watch something in here."

"That sounds great!" I said. "We'll help set it up!"

Cleo and I started to string the lights around the cave walls, finding natural resting places in the holds of the rock.

"Emma," Cleo whispered, "I believe you're about what you said with your locket."

I nodded. "I appreciate it Cleo. I just don't understand why it was there or why it disappeared after I felt it."

"If you think about it, Emma," Cleo said, "I don't understand half the things that have happened to us. But just because something doesn't make sense, doesn't mean it didn't happen. I think you should keep an eye on it, but don't worry about it just yet. It could be a good thing." Cleo smiled at me.

"Who knows, Cleo," I said. "But you're right, I say we don't worry about this. It's our last day together as friends for a while--let's have some fun!"

We spent the whole day in the cave, laughing and joking around. I can't remember a day where I had laughed that much in such a short amount of time.

When the sun finally set, the boys moved around to set up the projector while I helped Cleo and Rikki clean up some of the games we had been playing.

After we had set everything up (and Zane and Rikki had a minor argument about who got the red beanbag chair which almost resulted in Zane getting thrown in the water) Ash turned on one of our favorite movies.

I have to admit, though, I was more focused on enjoying this time with my friends. I kept looking at everyone, watching them laugh at some of our favorite parts. I looked around the cave, seeing the light reflect off the smooth rock and the stars shining through the small hole in the top. And having Ash in the beanbag right next to me was a little distracting.

After the movie was over we played music through a portable stereo and talked about everything coming up in the next year. Cleo and Rikki were both looking forward to finishing their last year of school, although Cleo seemed tenser than Rikki.

"I don't care what grades I get," Rikki stated. "As long as I don't fail my classes I'm fine."

"How can you say that, Rikki?" Cleo groaned. "All I can think about

are my grades. I have to do well if I want to get into a good college."

"I don't understand why you are so worried about how you will do, Cleo," Lewis said. "You know I can help you with anything you need me to."

"Ya, I know," Cleo said. "I'm just stressed out."

I started to drift away from the conversations going on around me. Cleo and Rikki stood up to get some more snacks, leaving Zane and Lewis awkwardly sitting next to each other. Even though a lot had happened in the past few months, those two still had a hard time finding things in common to talk about.

"I think I'm going to check the generator for the lights," Lewis said while standing up.

"And I think I'm going to grab another drink," Zane said quickly after.

I had to laugh. The only thing keeping those two in the same social circles were their girlfriends.

Just then, the wall that I was leaning against rumbled and shook, sending shivers down my back. I turned to Ash immediately.

"Did you feel that?" I asked.

He scrunched his eyebrows together and looked at me. "Feel what?"

I turned around and pressed my hand against the rock. "I just felt this wall move. It gave me chills."

"You felt the rock move?" Ash asked.

I kept patting at the stone, hoping to feel the movement that I thought was there only a few seconds ago. "Not move, exactly. It was more like a pulse."

"A pulse of what?"

"I'm not sure," I said. I slowly ran my hand over a crevice in the wall, trying to find anything that would explain what I just felt. "I guess the closest thing that I could compare it to would beâ€œa heartbeat."

I started to realize how ridiculous I sounded.

"You know what," Ash said, "I think you might be overreacting a little. I was right next to you and I didn't feel anything strange."

"Yaâ€œbut I really don't think I was making this upâ€œ" I looked down to see if any of the sand had shifted and noticed something completely different.

My necklace was being pulled toward the wall.

It wasn't enough to be obvious, but I could feel it pulling away from

my neck towards the wall in front of me. And it was so faint I wasn't completely sure I could really see it, but it looked like it was glowing blue.

I quickly grabbed the locket and flipped it over. The blue light seemed to be more concentrated right where I felt the latch the last time. I brushed my thumb across the bottom and sure enough, the latch was back.

I tried to pry it open, but it was so small that my thumb slipped out of the catch. I brought it closer to my eyes and realized that it wasn't a latch—it was a crack in the locket. Something had chipped away a thin slice of the metal and left a minuscule gap about a couple millimeters wide on the backside.

"Ash," I said, "do you see this?" I unclasped the necklace and handed it to Ash who was starting to look genuinely concerned for me. He took the locket and looked at the spot I was pointing to.

"I see a small gap, I guess," Ash said. "But it doesn't look like anything weird. Just like something chipped it."

"Here," I gestured Ash to come closer to the spot I was kneeling next to. "Bring it closer to the rock. Do you see anything different now?"

Ash squinted at the spot on the locket. "I think I see something. Almost like a tiny blue light. But it's so faint, I can hardly see it." He turned to look at me. "Is that what you were trying to show me?"

I looked behind me. Ash and I had been so quiet that no one had noticed what we were talking about. Usually I would share something like this with Cleo and Rikki, but I wasn't even sure what I was looking at.

"Ya, that's what I noticed," I answered, turning back to Ash. "The other day, I thought I felt something on the back but it wasn't there when I checked. Now I can finally see it; I think it might have been a reaction to the pulse I felt from the wall."

"Why would that make a slit on your locket show up?" Ash asked. "Do you think they are connected or something?"

This was one of those moments when I was so glad that Ash was my boyfriend. He was jumping right on board with my crazy discovery.

"I'm not sure, but that would make more sense than anything else I can come up with," I said. "These lockets have been around for decades—anything could have happened to them."

"Hey, I think the light is going away," Ash said.

I leaned in closer and sure enough, the glow disappeared. I reached my hand over to touch the bottom and the slit was gone.

"That is one of the strangest things I have ever seen," Ash mumbled. He ran his thumb over the same spot. "It's completely gone."

"And I have no control over getting it to come back," I groaned. "How am I supposed to figure out what it means?"

"Is everything okay?" I heard Rikki ask.

I whipped my head around and looked at her. She was still over at the snack table, looking at Ash and me.

"Everything is fine, Rikki," I said. "I just lost an earring and Ash was helping me find it." I gave her a smile, hoping she would buy it. She looked concerned, but turned back around to face Zane who was handing her a drink.

"Don't tell them just yet," I said to Ash. "I don't want them to worry about something that is just happening to me. Rikki and Cleo both said that they haven't noticed anything strange with their lockets."

"It's just your locket?" Ash asked. "Is there something special or different about the way your locket was made?"

"I don't think so," I said. "They were all made by the same person at the same time. If anything I would think something would be happening with Cleo's locketâ€"the person who made these was in love with the original owner. That was over fifty years ago."

"That long, huh?" Ash was turning the locket over in his hands. "I wish I could have an answer for you, Emma. But I honestly have no idea."

"I don't expect you to, Ash," I said. "But I sure wish I could figure this out."

"Well, for now," Ash said, "no earthquakes or storms or volcanoes are going off, so let's not stress, okay?" He smiled and brought the locket in front of me, clasping it behind my neck. "There. Right where it belongs."

I reached up and gave him a kiss, then rested my head on his shoulder.

"Since we're on the topic of jewelry," Ash said, "I have a gift for you." He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small box.

"We've been dating for a long time, and I wanted to give you something so you could have me with you. And it would also make me feel like you won't forget about me back in boring Australia," he said with a smile, handing me the box.

I sat up and turned to face him. I opened the box, and saw two earrings in the shape of snowflakes, made out of sterling silver. In the middle of each snowflake was a tiny, beautiful diamond.

I was speechless.

These were beautiful and I loved them.

"I chose the snowflakes because you can freeze water," Ash said. "The diamond in the middle also reminded me of ice, and they're beautiful like you."

He was being so sweet. No one had ever given me anything like this before.

"Ash, they are gorgeous," I said. "I can't believe you would get me something like this. Thank you so much." I wrapped my arms around his neck and gave him a kiss. "You are the best boyfriend ever. I will wear these every single day."

I took the earrings and placed them on my ears. "How do they look?" I asked.

Ash had the biggest smile on his face. "Perfect." He wrapped his arms around me and pulled me in to give me another kiss.

"Oh yeesh. I walk away for five minutes to get some food and you two are over here kissing," Rikki said. "If you wanted this to be an Emma and Ash party you should have given us some warning."

Ash and I both laughed. "Sorry Rikki," I said.

"I'm not really that sorry," Ash said. He was still smiling at me.

"I'll let it slide this time, Emma," Rikki joked, sitting down with a plate of snacks.

Pretty soon everyone was sitting in a circle, back to talking about anything and everything. Ash and I held hands the entire rest of the evening. I knew that in the morning I was going to have to say goodbye at the airport to these great friends and my amazing boyfriend, but for now, I was hanging out at Mako with the best people I could ask for.

* * *

><p>Thank you to everyone who is sticking with my story so far! I have some pretty neat ideas (if I do say so myself) coming up in the story and it is exciting to see it coming along! Look for an update within the next few weeks!<p>

6. New Zealand

I'm baaaaack! Hey, everyone (or at least everyone that's still around)! Remember when I said that I would keep this story going? Well I meant it! Even though it's been a while, I never had the intention of stopping this story, and I still don't! I've written a good, long chapter for you guys who still stuck around (and for those of you who are reading this for the first time, glad to have you!) and I can't wait for you to read it! So sit on back and enjoy the next addition to Emma's story!

* * *

><p>"I'm going to miss you guys," I said, while hugging Rikki and Cleo goodbye.<p>

We had finally packed everything up in our house, locking the door behind us and leaving Australia behind. Rikki, Cleo, Lewis, Zane, and

Ash had all followed my family to the airport to say goodbye, and we stood in front of the gate where my family would have to go through security. Mom, Dad, and Elliot had already said goodbye to my friends and were waiting in line, giving me some time alone for my goodbyes.

I gave Rikki and Cleo one last squeeze and looked them in the eyes. "I promise to keep our secret," I said. "Even if I have to look like a strawberry." I threw a pointed look at Lewis, who shrugged and raised his hands in the air.

Cleo gave me a quick smile and pulled away, reaching for Lewis who held her hand.

"Just don't do anything crazy, alright?" Rikki asked. Her eyebrows were scrunched, and her arms were still holding me tight.

"Rikki, this is me you're talking about," I smiled. "When have I ever done anything reckless?"

Rikki's face softened up and she gave me an understanding smile. "Ya, I guess that's my job in the group," she joked. She pulled me in for one last hug, and then joined Cleo and Lewis, with Zane right next to her.

Ash stepped forward, wrapping his arms around me, and I rested my head against his shoulder. He had come earlier than my other friends, so we had already had some private time to say goodbye. But I still knew saying this last goodbye to him would be the hardest.

"I've always been so glad that I trusted you," I told him. I tried to memorize how it felt to have him right with me, to make that memory last for a year. "It's made everything so much better."

Ash didn't say anything for a few seconds; he just kept holding me. "I love you," he said.

I pulled back just a little, so I could look at him. He was looking down, at the space right next to my shoes. I moved my head so he saw me, and gave him a smile. "I love you, too," I said.

We kissed one last time, and then we pulled away.

Picking up my carry-on bag, I turned around and started walking toward the security line to meet my family. Before I reached the gate, I turned around and gave everyone one last wave.

They all waved back, giving me smiles and wishing me safe travels. I turned back around and walked through the gate.

* * *

><p>"Here we are," my father said, opening the passenger door of the rental car for my mom.<p>

We had finally arrived at the resort where our houseboat was docked. Dad had told us that this resort was the "flagship" of the line of resorts, so other potential investors could come and visit to make up their minds.

I glanced up from the book I was reading and felt my mouth fall open. This place was gorgeous. The resort immediately reminded me of the beach, with the light dancing across the sandy finish of the walls in front and disappearing into the tropical landscaping.

Forget the beachâ€"this place reminded me of Mako.

"Dad, was Mr. Bennett inspired by Mako Island for these resorts?" I asked, putting down my book and gathering up my things.

He opened my door and smiled. "Yes he was."

Mr. Bennett couldn't make Mako into the resort he wanted, so he made his own version of Mako a whole plane ride away.

"He doesn't give up does he?" I joked, climbing out of the car and walking around to the trunk.

"No, he does not," my dad replied, closing the door.

I started to help my father pull our luggage out of the trunk while Elliot ran to get a cart to help wheel it all to our room. We had all managed to pack a year's worth of clothes into two suitcases each, and though that was a miracle by itself, I knew any help we could get would be great. The tension was already building in my back from moving just a couple of these bags.

"Dad!" Elliot said, "Guess who I found?"

I turned around and saw Mr. Bennett walking towards us with a bellhop next to him, who was pushing a couple of luggage carts.

"Hello, Neil!" Mr. Bennett said, extending his hand.

"Good to see you again, Harrison!" Dad said, reaching out to shake Mr. Bennett's hand.

"Have a good flight in?" he asked. "It'll be great to have you on this team, Neil. Will you still be able to attend the board meeting in an hour?"

"Absolutely," Dad replied. "This resort looks great, by the way. I can't see how anyone that is interested could say no once they see this place."

"That's the idea," Mr. Bennett replied, smiling. "I had the receptionist at the front desk check you in in advance, so I have your key right here and Will here will show you to the boat you will be staying in. I have to go finalize some details to present at the meeting, so I will see you in an hour." He turned towards Elliot, Mom, and me. "Good to see you all again. Enjoy seeing the boat!"

"Good to see you again as well, Harrison!" Mom replied, waving goodbye. "That was kind of him to see us in. This place definitely has my vote," Mom said with a smile.

"He's definitely making it easy for us," I replied, crossing my arms. I knew that after we tricked Dr. Denman with the lunar eclipse Mr. Bennett had no reason to suspect me of anything, but it still felt

uncomfortable when he was around. I could only think of how he knew something about me that not even my parents knew about, and that was too strange for my liking.

"Do you want me to take those for you?" I heard someone ask.

I turned around to see the bellhop gesturing toward the suitcases I still had at my feet.

"Yes, thank you," I replied, reaching down to pick them up.

"Don't worry, I got them," he said, walking around the carrier to put them up.

I noticed then that he was about my age. He reminded me of one of my cousins, actually; he had the same blonde hair and was just as tall as he was.

He picked up the bags and put them right on top of the pile. I raised my eyebrowâ€"those bags weren't light at all.

"Thank you for your help, Will," Mom said. "I don't know if Harrison told you but we are actually planning a world trip and packing a year's worth of necessities into something manageable wasn't easy."

"No problem at all," Will said. "If that's everything, I can show you to the boat you will be staying on. It's right this way."

We walked along a path that took us right through the trees and gardens of the resort, and I felt this strong dÃ©jÃ -vu while brushing against the leaves and flowers. Even the birds that were here were the same as the ones on Mako Island. I kept looking for speakers hidden in the plants to see if the sounds were recordingsâ€"there was no way the same birds from Mako were here in these trees.

"How long have you been working here, Will?" Dad asked.

"Not very long," Will replied. "I picked up the job as a way to make some money while I am on break from school. I'm only here for another week or so, though. My sister and I are actually moving to the Gold Coast before the new term starts up."

"That's where we live!" Elliot chimed in. "You're going to love it there, it's great."

"I'm looking forward to it," Will replied. "I know they have some great diving spots out there and I can't wait to see them for myself."

By this point we had made it to the shoreline of the resort's beachfront and some of the docks were starting to peek around the trees and sand. I looked over my shoulder and saw that the resort had a good amount of private space for the guests. The building itself was a good five hundred meters or so away from the shoreline; I logged that in my memory just in case I needed a quick breakaway.

When I turned back around I tripped over my own foot in

surprise—"these houseboats weren't the small houses I was expecting. Each one was three stories tall, with balconies on the upper floors and a patio on the main deck. They were a combination of pristine white walls with the company's signature in pale blue writing on the side, and railings and steps that shone silver in the sunlight. Giant windows were built into each story, which I'm sure made for a fantastic view of the bay.

"Wow!" Elliot shouted, practically running to the closest one and sprinting for the door.

"Elliot! We don't know if that one is ours!" I shouted after him. My parents were laughing, but what if someone was already living in the boat Elliot was about to barge into?

"It's okay, he got the right one," Will smiled. "Nothing to worry about."

"I wasn't worried," I replied. "I just didn't want to bother anyone."

"Sure," Will said, rolling his eyes and laughing quietly. He walked up to the door and gave Elliot the key, who then opened and charged through the door in less than a second.

I followed behind him and raised my eyebrows at what I saw. Right through the front door was a living area, complete with a fireplace and a flat screen television. Looking around I could tell that the walls had also been fitted with surround sound speakers.

To the right of the living area was the kitchen, with a note on the fridge saying it and the pantry were fully stocked. It had everything from an at-home espresso bar to a pizza oven, and a counter top that had bar stools custom-made so they could either face the television or look out of the bay window behind the stools.

"This place is awesome!" we all heard Elliot shout from somewhere.

I had to smile at that. Elliot may be thirteen but he could still be just as excited as a little kid.

"Would you like any help moving your bags?" I heard Will ask.

"I think we're fine from here," Dad said, handing Will a tip. "The elevator should help us move everything easily enough."

There was even an _elevator _in here?

"Thank you so much for your help, Will," Mom said. "And good luck with school."

"Thank you," Will said, starting to turn to the door. "Enjoy your stay!" He threw me a quick wave before he walked out the door and I waved back.

"He seemed like a nice guy," I said, walking over to the luggage cart. "I'm going to go move my stuff into my room!" I smiled at my parents, who were checking out the kitchen and the television, and after breaking a sweat to get my bags, wheeled them down the hall.

I made note of the bathroom a few feet down from the kitchen, which had a sink and toilet and plenty of space in case an accident occurred. I still hoped I wouldn't have to worry about it.

A little further down was the elevator, and past that was the door that led to the back patio. I pressed the "up" button and while I waited I glanced out the glass doors. There were some beautiful outdoor furniture pieces positioned around well, nothing. I was confused until I looked at the floor, which I realized was actually made of glass. You could see straight to the bottom of the bay, and I could only picture how amazing that would look if it were taken out a little further into the ocean.

The elevator arrived and I wheeled my bags in and pressed "2". A few seconds later, I was in another hallway that had a similar layout to the first floor. There was the balcony right behind me that featured some lounge furniture with a stereo and what looked like a retractable awning. A few feet down the hall was another bathroom, this one with a shower/bath and a window that was high enough to provide privacy as well as show off a beautiful view of the water.

Down the hall on the same side as the bathroom was a bedroom, with a bed that had a built-in bookshelf above it, a dresser, a large window, and a flat screen mounted on the wall across from the bed. There also seemed to be a speaker right next to the door, which I soon realized must be a part of an intercom system running through the boat.

Across the hall was another bedroom, but this one was larger and had its own bathroom attached to it. It also had a desk. I immediately put my suitcases in front of the dresser and closed the door on my way out, making note of the intercom speaker that was installed next to it, as well.

I knew the only door left on the hall was the master bedroom and glanced inside to see what it would be like.

It had to be at least the size of the kitchen space downstairs, as well as a part of the living area. It had a huge bed that faced the huge window that I saw from outside the boat and for a moment I was distracted by how beautiful the water looked from up here. Snapping back to my senses, I kept looking and noticed that it had two dressers with a TV mounted above them that rivaled the size of the one in the living space downstairs. It also had an en-suite bathroom with a large tub and separate shower, as well as a vanity.

I could definitely get used to living on a boat like this.

I walked back to the elevator and pressed the button to go up one more floor. Arriving at the top, I immediately realized that it was a game room. It had everything from board games piled upon shelves to the newest gaming consoles in front of another giant television screen. There was a kitchenette along the back wall, stocked with snacks and drinks, I could only imagine.

Through the glass doors that led to the patio, I noticed there was also a hot tub outside. It was positioned at the front of the boat and could definitely hold at least eight people.

This boat was made to create a luxury experience and I certainly believed it. I couldn't help but wonder at what that hot tub would feel like if I could have it all to myself. I could easily freeze the lock on the door so no one could come out—but I quickly realized that that plan could never happen because regardless of whether or not the door was locked, anyone could see through the glass.

I mentally smacked myself on the head and started to walk to the elevator to meet back up with my family in the living room before Dad went to his meeting.

"What do you think?" Dad said to me with a smile on his face. "It's a pretty nice place to stay, isn't it?"

"It's only the coolest place ever!" Elliot said from the couch. He had already gotten into the pantry and had a box of cookies open on his lap.

"It is pretty awesome," I said, returning Dad's smile. "Honestly, I didn't know it was going to be this nice. Was this always the plan?"

"Initially the boats were going to be slightly smaller, but still a step-up from the everyday hotel room," Dad said. "But when Harrison decided to invest in the company, that enabled them to upgrade their boats even further. This boat was built to be more family-friendly, and there are other models that will appeal to other groups of travelers as well. A few more people have joined in investing, so we're aiming for this line of resorts to be a worldwide luxury experience."

"Well, I believe it," I said, walking over to the pantry to grab a water bottle. "This place seems to have everything. I know at first I was a little nervous about the idea, but now I'm really excited to see how these boats will look in other places, too."

"I'm glad," Dad said, wrapping an arm around Mom. "Well, I'm going to catch up with Harrison before the meeting starts. You all have fun and we can plan on going out for dinner later, alright?"

"Sounds good, dear," Mom said, giving Dad a quick kiss on the cheek.

At that moment I felt a slight lurch in my stomach. Seeing my parents together made me miss Ash. And missing Ash made me miss my friends.

I sighed as I placed a straw into my water bottle. Something had been on my mind since I saw the stretch of beach running behind the resort. New Zealand wasn't that far away from Australia, and Lewis said that our ability to communicate underwater could easily span a large distance. Maybe tonight I could test that.

"Alright, Emma and Elliot, how about we talk about the school plan for the next year real quick?" Mom said, pulling my focus back.

"Aw, Mom, I really want to check out the game room again," Elliot moaned. "Can't we talk about this later?"

"It'll be quick, I promise," Mom said. She walked over to the kitchen

table and gestured to us to come over as well. I couldn't help but get excited. I always loved the beginning of another school year and the structure that came with it.

"So before we left I met with your teachers that you would have had for this upcoming year," she began, pulling out two large binders from a bag next to the table. "We created a homeschooling schedule that would more than prepare Emma for college and Elliot for his next year." She pushed our binders towards us and we opened them to see a calendar that took up the first chunk of the binder.

"It has the same material that your friends will be learning, so if you want to talk with them about a project that you see on the calendar, you can work on it together. For the assignments and exams, I'll be scanning them and emailing them to your teachers. They'll then grade them and email them back to me."

"This looks great, Mom," I said, flipping through the pages. "It looks like I won't be behind in school at all."

"Actually, you're going to be ahead, Em," Mom replied. "What we've done is coordinate the different locations that we will be visiting with the material that you will be learning. So when we're in Japan, for example, the economics lesson you have for that day will focus on the structure that exists there. Having this kind of exposure is going to look great for colleges, Emma."

"That's a perfect idea, Mom," I said, looking back up at her.

"Glad you like it," she replied, smiling. "Elliot, what do you think?"

"It's okay, I guess," he said. "I mean, I would have had homework anyway so at least this makes it seem cooler."

"Good," Mom said, reaching out to ruffle his hair. "Okay, now you can go see the game room."

"Sweet!" Elliot shouted, and then ran off to the elevator with the box of cookies back in his hands.

"I have a feeling we won't be seeing him for a while," I said while closing my binder.

Mom laughed. "I think you're right about that. How about we enjoy the peace and quiet by getting settled in?"

Mom still had her bags downstairs, so I helped her wheel them down the hall and into the elevator.

"Mom, you said there was Wi-Fi on this boat, right?" I asked. "Do you have the password for it?"

The door opened and we started wheeling the bags down to the master bedroom.

"I think it's in the visitor guidebook that was on the kitchen counter," she said, bringing her luggage to one of the dressers in her room. "If it's not there just let me know and I'll bet your father could ask Harrison where we could find it."

"Alright," I said, bringing her other suitcase up to her. "I'm going to get my friends on Skype and show them around the boat. They're definitely going to want to see this."

Mom smiled. "That sounds like a great idea. I'll just be in here if you need anything."

I quickly grabbed my laptop on my way to the kitchen and found the guidebook on the counter under the microwave. I easily found the code for the Internet and set out a text to my friends, asking when they could chat.

I immediately got a bunch of replies, and we eventually decided that they would all meet at Cleo's to use her account, and we would chat in an hour.

I decided to use that time to unpack my things and make my room feel more at home.

The first thing I did was put all the pictures I had brought onto my desk. Then I looked at my wardrobe schedule for this stop on our trip, and pulled out the clothes I had already planned to use while we stayed in New Zealand.

One hour later I had my stuff put away and was sitting at my desk seeing all my friends waving on my computer screen.

"Hi, everyone!" I waved, grinning from ear to ear.

"Hey, Emma!" they all said back, Rikki being the loudest, of course.

"How's the place?" Ash asked. He was sitting right in front, and I felt another tug in my stomach. I missed him so much already.

"That's what I was calling to talk to you guys about," I said, smiling again. "This place is ridiculous and I wanted to show you around. Ready for a tour?"

I picked up my computer and showed them around my room first, pointing out the pictures that I had set up on my desk that had all of my friends in it. Then I took them to the first floor, shaking my computer around when I showed them the glass floor outside to emphasize how nuts this place was. I finished with the game room upstairs, which I knew would get all the boys going.

"I can't believe you get to live there!" Ash exclaimed. "If I were you, I probably wouldn't move from that spot in front of the television for a whole day."

I laughed. "I think Elliot has the same idea," I said. I then turned the computer so they could see Elliot stretched out on the couch with his cookies next to him. "Say hi, Elliot!"

All I got from Elliot was a grunt.

Everyone laughed. Elliot may have been in the room physically but his mind wasn't here at all.

"Emma! Elliot! Your father's back from his meeting so we're going out to eat!" Mom's voice sounded from the intercom, "Come on downstairs!"

I glanced back over to Elliot, who looked like he hadn't even heard Mom speak. I pressed the button under the speaker to respond. "Mom, you're lucky I'm up here with Elliot. I think it's going to be a battle to pull him away from this television. I'll try to get him down there in a few minutes."

I turned my attention back to my computer. "I guess that means I have to go, guys. But I'm so glad I was able to show you around."

"We loved seeing it, Emma!" Cleo said. "And it definitely looks a lot safer than what we were all picturing."

I looked up to see if Elliot had responded to what Cleo said. He still hadn't moved an inch.

"I feel the same way, Cleo," I smiled. "And I was thinking, it's going to be easier to keep in touch than we thought. You want to talk again at ten my time?" I raised my eyebrows to try and show them that I meant in the water.

Rikki's face lit up. "Absolutely!" she said. "Lewis, it's time to see if your nerd knowledge paid off."

"You know, I'm still waiting for the day when you will appreciate all the work I've done for you," Lewis replied, pretending to look offended.

"Tell that to the bruises I have from falling on my butt," Rikki replied, rolling her eyes.

I laughed. "Okay, I'll plan on speaking with you guys later. Bye!"

I waved to the camera and then looked at Ash. They all waved back, but I could tell he was thinking the same thing I was.

This was going to be a long year.

I closed my laptop before I let myself think about it anymore and walked over to Elliot.

"Alright, Elliot," I said, blocking his view of the screen. "Let's go get some real food to go with that box of cookies you ate, hmm?"

I pulled him up from the couch and turned off the gaming system.

"I think that's a good idea," he said, holding his stomach. "And I think I'm going to take a break from video games for a while."

I laughed and wrapped my arm around him. "That's probably a good idea," I said. "Maybe we can look through those board games later, instead."

"Emma? Elliot?" I heard Mom's voice calling through the speaker. "Are you coming down?"

I walked over to the speaker. "Yes, Mom, we're on our way now," I replied.

"There's an intercom system, too?" Elliot asked, looking shocked. "I didn't even notice."

"Why am I not surprised?" I joked. "I don't think you would have heard a meteor crash into our boat. Now let's go get some dinner."

* * *

><p>A few hours later, when my family had turned in early from our day of traveling, I slipped out the door and slid into the water. It was really warm here and felt great. A few seconds later, I was gliding through the dark blue water, enjoying the feeling of water gliding over my tail.<p>

I had checked the clock on my way out the door, and thought that Cleo and Rikki should be in the water by now. I tested it out by pushing something out there.

Cleo? Rikki? Are you there?

I floated under the surface of the water, pushing the water above my head to keep myself covered. Though it was too dark for anyone to see below the surface, I didn't want to risk it.

I waited a few more seconds, but I still didn't hear anything. I tried again.

Cleo? Rikki?

Silence.

Disappointed, I started to make my way back to the shoreline. The distance we were trying to cross was pretty far. I was stupid to have thought that our communication could have crossed that much water.

Then, I felt two distinct pulses of water against my ears.

_Emma! Emma, we can hear you! _I heard Rikki's voice sound.

I squealed in the water, grinning.

_I can't believe this actually works! _Cleo shouted. _This is incredible! Emma is an entire time zone away and we can hear each other like we are speaking right next to each other! Well, I guess Rikki and I _are _right next to each other, but you sound perfectly clear, Emma!_

The resort had been beautiful. The houseboat was a great surprise. Giving my friends a tour was so much fun, and dinner with my family was great. But thisâ€"the knowledge that my friends could feel so close to me wherever I went, felt amazing. It was like I had a piece of home with me, and no matter how far I traveled from it, I could always feel like I was there.

* * *

><p>So, what did you guys think? Pretty nice place for a mermaid to stay, huh? I know I wouldn't mind living there.</p>

And extra pats on the back to those of you who caught the little cameo in this chapter! That wasn't something I originally had planned but I snuck it in there for a little fun. I mean, he had to come from somewhere, right? =)

Thank you to those of you who read this chapter! If you liked it, want to share your thoughts on it, or want me to sneak any places of interest for Emma to travel to on this trip, review and let me know! I have an outline of places that she will definitely be going to, but if you have a great idea I might just sneak it in! ;)

I hope everyone is enjoying their summer! Up next for Emma's travels: Japan!

End
file.